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ABSTRACT

Two films made in the 1960's, "The Troublemakers" and "16 in Webster Groves," present a problem of democracy worthy of young people's consideration--social responsibility--and can be studied in the context of a general unit on responsibility. One way of presenting "16 in Webster Groves" is through devising, distributing, and discussing a poll like that used in the film. "The Troublemakers" can be shown in three sections, with students discussing and writing a paper on each section. The study of the films can be followed by a class project on planning a community. The purpose of the unit is to have children learn not the materials, which will become quickly dated, but rather the process of how to learn. (LH)

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BY BUD CHURCH. In the middle 60's two films were made that together present especially well a major problem of democracy. One was shot in 1965 in the ghetto of Newark, New Jersey. Two summers later that ghetto flamed. The film is called *The Troublemakers.* It follows the activities of several college students who try to organize the black citizens of Newark's Central Ward at a grass roots level.

The other film was shot in 1966 in Webster Groves Missouri, an affluent suburb of St. Louis. It was made by C.B.S. News and put on TV as *16 in Webster Groves.* It attempts to give insight into young people growing up in "six square miles of the American Dream," as Charles Kuralt, the narrator, puts it.

The two films are as different as urban and suburban, wretched and well-to-do, frustrated and complacent, black and white. But both have one thing in common: human beings who are Americans struggling to shape for themselves a worthwhile community.

"Community" is a warm word. Community takes most whites back to "Dick and Jane": neat houses and apartments, trim lawns and tidy sidewalks, pleasant policemen and doormen, well-tailored fathers coming home at 5 PM, gentle mothers shopping and baking, and—except for maids and garbagemen—all white.

Black involvement, black equality, are not part of our story-book understanding of community. The 1960's have brought into shameful focus just how much this understanding must be up-dated. As the President's National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders makes absolutely clear, if we continue to head toward two communities, one white, one black, "separate and unequal," America will not survive as a national community. "Dick and Jane" must go.

Troublemakers and *16 in Webster Groves* are apt models of the two crucial, if not pervasive, life-styles of America. They highlight the major problem of democracy today: the transformation of this nation to a new experience of community. What are these two life-styles? What do they have in common and how do they differ? Most important, can they relate and integrate, can they form the basis of one community in America? Or does the American Dream die along with Dick and Jane?

There are, of course, many ways to use the two films in the classroom in order to examine these questions. I first used them in a senior elective course called "Literature and Problems of Democracy" in which a social studies teacher, Bob Dodds, and I were teamed. The forty-eight students taking the course had us scheduled together for double the amount of time of a regular course. Consequently, the course satisfied the requirements for both senior English and social studies. We were pleased that students electing the course ranged from slow to bright average because we felt the topics we wanted to pursue were relevant to all ability levels, and that discussions would be more richly nourished by a heterogeneous group.

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Bob and I already had presented materials that dealt with a basic theme of democracy, man's responsibility to man. Because this theme necessarily raises the question of community, it might be well to list these materials, roughly in their order of use, before turning to the films themselves.

—1. Both of us used the feature film, *Nothing But a Man* (*M & M*, October 1967), the story of a black man's struggle for manhood in the South.

—2. Following this Bob used *The Negro Revolt,* by Louis Lomax, a historical account of black experience; I used a novel, *A Patch of Blue* by Elizabeth Kata (which Gov. Lester Maddox of Georgia recently suggested be removed from state schoolrooms), a story of affection between a blind white girl and a black man.

—3. Both of us used the short animated film, *Boundary Lines,* which deals with a dramatization of the history of barriers between people.

—4. Both of us worked with excerpts from the autobiographical novel about Harlem, *Manchild in the Promised Land,* by Claude Brown (see review elsewhere in this issue).

—5. To give a general picture of middle-class white attitudes toward responsibility in a success-oriented society, I used Arthur Miller's play, *All My Sons.* At the same time Bob took articles from *Life, Time* and other popular media to explore attitudes of whites toward the riots of the previous summer.

—6. At this point we showed another short film, *Neighbors,* which gives a symbolic but graphic account of two men fighting over one flower that grows on the line between their properties.

—7. Next we brought in a speaker who presented the case for regional responsibilities across town lines using greater New Haven and our own community of North Haven as his example.

—8. Finally, we zeroed in on a hypothetical issue: the bussing of a nominal number of black children in grades 1-4 from the inner city of New Haven to elementary schools in North Haven. This led to a series of debates with students from Lee High School in New Haven. Students from both schools took both sides.

The climax came when the following spring the bussing issue was no longer hypothetical but real, splitting North Haven into several factions, many of which were far less informed on the issue than a number of the Lit. & P.O.D. students who got actively involved.

It was no accident that we came at this theme of responsibility from many sides using many kinds of genre and media. Here and there I slipped in poems, such as Langston Hughes' "A Dream Deferred," and songs such as Janis Ian's "Society's Child." Naturally the students wrote frequently and I worked with their writing.

This unit was exhaustive if not exhausting and it was time to leave it and move on, which we did. Several weeks later, however, our A. V. Director bought *The Troublemakers* and *16 in Webster Groves* for the school. I knew of both and couldn't resist using them.

Accordingly, we passed out a ditto one day telling the Lit. & P.O.D. class that they would see the two films on two consecutive days, describing the films briefly as profiles of two communities, and asking them to consider for followup discussion:

—1. What attitudes does each community seem to be motivated by?

—2. What hints do you get of how the two communities view each other?

—3. The word "community" is related to the word "communicate." What would it take to have the two communities communicate with each other?

—4. What seems to be the role of young people in each community?

—5. What is "healthy" and what is "unhealthy" about each of the communities?

Following the discussion we had them write a paper discussing North Haven as a community.

The films call for fuller treatment than we gave them. There is much in each one separately and in the relationship between the two that merits examination. In the first place, throughout *16 in Webster Groves* reference is made

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to a lengthy poll given by C.B.S. to all the 16-year-olds in Webster Groves. From the film one can surmise what some key questions in the poll were:

—1. What do you worry about most?
—2. How do you feel about your courses in school?
—3. What do you want school to do most for you?
—4. What do you feel is essential to success?
—5. Have you ever cheated?
—6. What is your main goal in life?
—7. If you had a chance to tell adults what it is like to be a teenager, what would you say?
—8. How would you describe the relationship between whites and blacks in your community?

Other questions get at their views on politics, religion, war, civil rights, sex, and other such topics. These are compared with views of their parents. In all, there are 3 pages to the poll.

The questions in the poll are worth having young people think about. I would use the poll to begin a unit as outlined below:

—1. Devise a poll taking cues from the questions in the film and give it to the students anonymously early in the year.
—2. Outline the results of the poll and let them reflect on this in any way they wish. This session should be videotaped if possible.
—3. Run a unit similar to the one on "Responsibility" outlined above, perhaps abbreviating it, perhaps substituting other materials. I would use the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, working in the section on Newark especially.

I would still use the two films as a summary for the unit, coming back to the poll as a jumping off point for the following daily procedure:

—*Day 1*: Ditto up as much of the results of the poll in *16 in Webster Groves* as is valuable. Discuss these results the day before showing the film. Without drawing conclusions, discuss what the poll tells about the community. Assign a short paper, due *Day 3*, in which the students discuss the attitudes that seem to be dominant in Webster Groves.

—*Day 2*: Show the film.

—*Day 3*: Discuss the topic assigned for the paper. Try to arrive at a community profile based on the discussion. Introduce *The Troublemakers.* At five points in this film the action is frozen and the words of an outline in actual outline form are super-imposed over the stilled scene. Put together, the outline reads: "1) The Problems of Organizing. 2) Issue: Organizing Housing. 3) Issue: Organizing Traffic Light. 4) Joining a Political Campaign. 5) Summary." Pass out a ditto with this outline on it and tell the students that next they will see a film that depicts a black inner-city community. Assign a short paper, *due Day 7*, dealing with the same topic as the one they wrote for *16 in Webster Groves.*

The Troublemakers, with its outline format, lends itself to being shown and discussed in sections. I suggest showing the films in three sections, each taking about twenty minutes.

—*Day 4*: Show the first section up to: "2) Issue: Organizing Housing" Discuss this section.

—*Day 5*: Show the section: "2) Issue: Organizing Housing." Discuss it.

—*Day 6*: Show the rest of the film. Some of the discussion over these three days will be to clarify points. At any time during the three days, however, issues that the students raise, especially in relationship to the Webster Groves' film, should be pursued. A careful preview of the films will allow the teacher to focus points that the students initiate, helping to clarify through their discussion some of the more subtle relationships between the films.

—*Day 7*: Short paper due on *The Troublemakers.* More valuable than a discussion at this point, and more fun, would be to select from the two films several characters from each community and let the students role-play the attempt of these people to communicate with each other.

—*Day 8*: Return to the poll the class took several weeks earlier showing excerpts of the video-tape made during their discussion, and allowing time for random reactions to this. Assign a major project for which each student can choose one of the following, or substitute its equivalent: 1. Designing a Model Community; 2. Researching the Planning of Some Nearby Community; 3. Analysing the Attitudes and Writing a Summary Profile of His Own Community; 4. Creating a Tape-Slide Show Portraying for some Specific Effect Slides from His Own Community, Slides from a Neighboring but Differing Community, and Music or Commentary that Integrates the Two.

If this unit is done in conjunction with another school, then time should be built in, of course, for exchanges. There are other dimensions to the films that have not been explored here. For instance, both represent a kind of documentary art form, the one by C.B.S. being rather slick in that respect, and "The Troublemakers" being in some ways even more impressive because it was done by amateurs.

This article and the outlines in it are meant to be suggestive. As with the use of any materials, the point is to have students learn how to learn, and not the materials themselves. For both films are already becoming dated. Like *Ivanhoe* and *Silas Marner* and thin-skinned anthologies—those older brothers of Dick and Jane Readers—they may someday become quaint relics of extinct pedagogies. Let us hope so. Moreover there are increasingly fine documentaries on television. But we cannot teach them all anymore than we can teach all the books we hope students will read once we have engaged them in a variety of meaningful reading experiences. The aim is to have these two films together, as artfully done documentaries, do two things: 1. Raise essential issues about democracy that persist even as times change; and even more important, 2. suggest a framework through which an individual can view television and film documentaries more critically and meaningfully. If the second is not as much an aim as the first we are propagandists, not educators.

The two films are not dated yet, however. The attitudes persist and the issues burn on. At the end of *16 in Webster Groves* the high school chorus sings an exhilerating anthem to "A Great Country" with words that include: "Take a look in your history book and you'll see that we should be proud." As we are becoming painfully aware, the experience of Newark's Central Ward and the real history of all black people in America has not been told like it is. The history books have been written by Dicks and Janes for Dicks and Janes. History will not be kind to a national community that allows such songs to be sung in Webster Groves and allows such systematic oppression and despair in Newark. Change must occur.

"But what if change is impossible to achieve within this society?" asks the narrator at the end of *The Troublemakers.* The burden of the answer to that question is on all of the Webster Groves of America, and on all of the schools in all of the Webster Groves of America. While black men are taking a new corner and at last proclaiming pride in their beauty, white America, in order to be rid of the chains that ironically enslave it, must finally awake and see too that black is beautiful.

"Where Do We Go From Here, Chaos Or Community?" asks Dr. Martin Luther King in the title of his last book. It is a question all Americans must confront and all schools must raise before we dare sing any more anthems. Our greatness all too surely depends, not on the singing, but on the answer.

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THE TROUBLEMAKERS (b/w, 54 minutes) is distributed by Cinema 16 Film Library, 80 University Place, New York, 10003. For further information, check Infocard 50.

SIXTEEN IN WEBSTER GROVES (b/w, 47 minutes) is distributed by Carousel Films, 1501 Broadway, New York 10036. For further information, check Infocard 51.

NOTHING BUT A MAN (b/w, 92 minutes) is distributed by Brandon Films, 221 W. 57th St., New York 10019. For further information, check Infocard 52.

BOUNDARY LINES (color, 10 minutes) is distributed by the International Film Foundation, 475 Fifth Ave., New York 10017. For further information, check Infocard 53.

NEIGHBORS (color, 9 minutes) is distributed by the International Film Bureau, 332 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago 60604. For further information, check Infocard 54.